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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0134
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 5204
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4971
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 7779
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1446
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 3734
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1892
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4791
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON 0127
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0769
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 9882
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 4227
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 005374

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NSC FOR PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/01/2017
TAGS: PREL PGOV PREF PHUM KDEM KPAO TH BM
SUBJECT: PUTTING BURMA IN THE FOREFRONT OF THAI
DELIBERATIONS

REF: A. BANGKOK 5315
1B. BANGKOK 5314

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Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) In an effort to boost Thailand's awareness and consideration of current events in Burma, Embassy Bangkok has coordinated public outreach efforts, held meetings with key RTG officials and third country diplomats, as well as continued contact with various Thailand-based Burmese exiles working for democratic change in their homeland. Fellow diplomats concur with the need to keep the issue alive in various segments of Thai society, as highlighted by the Chinese and British Ambassadors joining the U.S. Ambassador on a major Thai talk show to discuss Burma on October 5. End Summary.

PRESSING FOR MEDIA COVERAGE

12. (U) During the past two weeks the Public Affairs Section (PAS) orchestrated several outreach efforts with local media to bring them up to date on current events in Burma. Despite lackluster coverage at the beginning of the protests, Thai media headlined the military crackdown beginning September 25 and continued front page reporting for several days, though this has since waned. In addition to regular contact, we arranged for local media (including newspapers, television, radio and websites) to publish statements made by the President and Mrs. Bush decrying the Burmese regime's violent

crackdown of the protesters. Using our resources at the IRC, we sent a special "Issues-in-Focus: Burma" edition that included all recent USG statements to more than 400 subscribers. The mission website is kept up-to-date with fact sheets and official statements highlighting USG policy on Burma. We will continue to work in the coming weeks and months to identify new ways to keep Burma in the news in Thailand.

¶3. (U) On October 5 the Ambassador joined his counterparts from China and Britain on one of the country's most popular news programs ("World Beat") to discuss current events in Burma. Editor in Chief of the media conglomerate "the Nation Group" Suthichai Yoon hosted the program, which aired the evening of October 8. The Ambassadors held a frank discussion about Burma, with interviews by monks and exiled student activists used to set the scene. The highlight of the program occurred when the Chinese Ambassador stated that the Burmese people should choose their own government (referring to China's long standing view that it was an internal matter), to which the U.S. Ambassador replied that the Burmese people had tried to choose, and were met with bullets from the military.

¶4. (U) Finally, PAS coordinated with Embassy Rangoon to have local and Bangkok-based international media interview Charge Villarosa in Rangoon, which resulted in several interviews with prominent Thai media outlets and ongoing contact with the international press. Various print and television outlets circulated her poignant eyewitness descriptions of events and strong reiteration of USG policy on Burma. These included pieces on major televised news programs and continuing coverage in online reports.

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RTG OFFICIALS OPEN TO HEARING US OUT...

¶5. (C) We continue to reach out to our counterparts at the MFA and in other offices to press the RTG to take a stronger stance in its reaction to Burma. To date the RTG (particularly the MFA) is reluctant to change its engagement policy (or lack thereof). MFA Director General of the Department of American and South Pacific Affairs Nongnuth Phetcharatana told us that until the USG takes action against Chevron operations in Burma, it would be difficult for the MFA in Thailand, or for their counterparts in other countries in the region, to argue for curtailing economic relations with Burma in light of recent events. We noted that the U.S. had already curtailed about 98% of its economic (and potential economic) relations with Burma so to require the U.S. to cut off the last 2% before countries in the region would do the first 1% was rather unbalanced. She admitted that was true, but said nevertheless that with Chevron continuing to do business it was hard for them to make the case. Nongnuth added that of course even if we did go after Chevron operations, there was no guarantee that other governments in the region would follow suit. However, there seems to be a growing recognition of the international community's expectation that the RTG must do something more. The Prime Minister's speech at the UNGA struck a new, tougher note that we welcomed.

¶6. (C) In a meeting with the legislature's Foreign Affairs Committee chair October 10, we heard that the Thai are disturbed by the crackdown, particularly the abuse of monks. But the chairman also emphasized Thailand's dependence on Burma for energy sources. We noted that Thailand seemed to be lagging behind other countries in ASEAN in expressing its concerns about the Burmese junta, and we pointed out that Thailand, which has fought for its own democracy, would be expected to be a leader in promoting democratic reform in the region. The chairman accepted copies of USG statements on Burma and said he would distribute them to other members of

his committee. We will meet with the legislature's security committee chairman later this week to make the same points. We do not anticipate any significant help from the military-appointed legislature, which is close to the end of its term, but hope to at least raise awareness about the ongoing abuses in Burma, and the strength of international reaction against the junta.

...BUT FELLOW DIPLOMATS MORE PROACTIVE

¶7. (C) On October 8 the Ambassador organized a consultative session with Ambassadors from a range of countries sharing similar views about the military junta in Burma (ref A). This broad group of diplomats shared the view that now more than ever we must push to keep the issue of Burma alive in Thailand and throughout the region.

MAINTAINING SUPPORT FOR EXILE COMMUNITY

¶8. (C) We continue to meet with Burmese activist exiles based in Thailand. We will continue to send the message that the USG supports the efforts of those within and outside of the country to promote democratic change in Burma. Various exiles expressed their belief that recent events have only strengthened the Burmese resolve to keep pushing for change (ref B).

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COMMENT

¶9. (C) Despite decades of engagement, 2,400 kilometers of a shared border, and the presence of perhaps two million Burmese here, most Thais remain almost indifferent to the ongoing humanitarian crisis and abuse of human rights taking place in neighboring Burma. Embassy Bangkok is actively working to draw attention to the plight of the Burmese people through official channels and the media.

BOYCE